

Mr. CHAMBERS. Then I give that notice. And if there be any member of the Convention on either side of the house who would desire to address the Convention upon this subject, it would rather be a relief to me than an interruption to have the gentleman indulge his wish at the present moment. I have been indisposed for some time past, and hardly feel in a condition to address this body. [A pause.] In the absence of any purpose on the part of any gentleman here to address them, I must ask the indulgence of the Convention until the arrival of a page that I have sent to my rooms to get what few papers I have upon this subject.

Mr. BRISCOE. Mr. President, I feel that in offering to substitute myself in the stead of the gentleman from Kent, (Mr. Chambers,) even for a very short time, and thereby obtrude my remarks upon the attention of this Convention, I am placing myself in a very delicate position. Notwithstanding that, if I am permitted to proceed, I will say a very few words in advocacy of the amendment which I have offered, and which is now pending before this body.

It seems to me that this is a question of very great importance. In looking back upon the course of argument that gentlemen have pursued upon this subject; taking the range of the whole political history of the country; discussing the merits of the men who are now administering this government; discussing the causes that produced the present civil war; examining the circumstances that have given rise to it; we are very clearly traveling out of the legitimate range of the subject before the Convention, and going into the consideration of questions not pertinent to it. If we enter upon a review of the acts of the Legislature of Maryland at Frederick, it must be seen that it will open up so wide a field of debate that it becomes really a matter of some difficulty for one addressing the Convention, at this stage of the argument, to know how to progress with the subject before us. Any of us who will look to the times and circumstances upon us, who will look to the occurrences in the history of our country for the last few years, and consider the actual condition of the public mind even upon the question of calling this very Convention, will feel but little encouraged to address himself to a question of grave constitutional character.

I believe it has come to be generally considered that the word "Constitution" conveys almost an obsolete idea. It has been said by somebody that it is a word more talked about and less understood than any other word in the English language. I have thought so, too, and would therefore approach the subject under any circumstances with very great diffidence. Indeed, Mr. President, it was declared in the Senate of the United States, by a man occupying a very high position in this country, a few months ago in discussing the

relative powers of the Government of the United States and the powers of the State Governments, that he felt ashamed to mention the word "Constitution." It had become a word of derision. I refer to no less a man than Mr. Collamer, a Senator from the State of Vermont, a man who holds a very high position, for his literary and political attainments, as a statesman in this country. I ask then with what encouragement can we approach the discussion of this question, when in the Senate of the United States, even one of the high priests of the party represented by the majority upon this floor, felt constrained to use such expressions as these: "I do not wish to occupy the time of the Senate," said Mr. Collamer, "by making any remarks about the Constitution of the United States. I think it a subject almost of derision here—with many gentlemen it is an object of derision. As it is so in a great measure, and a man is sneered at for mentioning the Constitution, and if he has a decent respect for it and for his own oath, he is called a 'timid man.' I do not wish to take up much of the attention of a body where such a subject is treated in such a manner." When our public men at the head of the Government so speak, will we not hesitate here and feel humiliated for our country?

When I first moved to amend this article by striking out the word "paramount," I did not expect that the discussion upon it in this body would have taken this wide and extended range. It is true, I had some preconceived ideas of the kind of government we had lived under in the State of Maryland. I had turned to the Declaration of Rights under which we had lived, but had found no article therein partaking of the character of the one here proposed. I had also looked to the Constitution of the United States. I had been taught to believe, and had so acted in my political career in the past, that the Constitution of the United States, and the laws of Congress passed in pursuance thereof, and all treaties made under the authority of the United States, were the supreme law of the land. I had further found that the State of Maryland, in defining what the rights of her people were, had said in the second article of this bill of rights, which article this Convention has already adopted, that the people of this State ought to have the sole and exclusive right of regulating the internal government and police thereof.

Now, when this novel proposition came before this Convention, it seemed to me that, if we determined to adopt it, it would tend in all time to come, so far as the legislation of the Federal Government could affect the future administration of the affairs of this State, to encourage the exercise of those broad and enlarged powers of the Government of the United States, which I believe has been the Pandora's box whence have issued all the